DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 344 329 EA 023 906

AUTHOR Conley, David T.
TITLE Five Key Issues in Restructuring. ERIC Digest, Number 69.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Eugene, Oreg.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-EA-92-2
PUB DATE May 92
CONTRACT RI88062004
NOTE 3p.
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon, 1787 Agate Street, Eugene, OR 97403 (free; $2.50 postage and handling).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; Change Strategies; *Community Support; *Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; *High Risk Students; *Outcomes of Education; *Principals; *School Restructuring
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Five key issues can serve to summarize the complexity of the restructuring process and some of the challenges being faced: (1) developing a vision that unites projects; (2) identifying outcomes that will be assessed; (3) obtaining the active support of the community; (4) redefining the role of principals from power-wielders to facilitators; and (5) changing basic organizational practices to better meet the needs of at-risk students. (10 references) (MLF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ERIC DIGEST

MAY 1992 NUMBER 69 EDO-EA-92-2

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED344329

Five Key Issues in School Restructuring

by Dr. David T. Conley

Five key issues can serve to summarize the complexity of the restructuring process and some of the challenges being faced. The first issue consists of developing a vision that unites projects. Identifying outcomes that will be assessed is also crucial, as is obtaining the active support of the community at large. Also important is principals' ability to redefine their roles by becoming facilitators. Finally, changing basic organizational practices to better meet the needs of at-risk students is another issue that requires attention.

Systems Thinking: From Projects to Visions

Most schools begin restructuring by developing a project or projects. Examples include new governance models, block scheduling, integrated curriculum, or technology labs. Educators are coming to realize that restructuring requires a systems perspective. Projects may be important first steps, but restructuring is rarely accomplished through a series of disconnected projects, no matter how innovative. A vision must overarch and unite these projects. Beyond such agreement, schools have little guidance as they undertake vision development.

In general, vision seems to be built by creating an environment in which all participants in the school have access to information about current practices and shortcomings within the school, to current journals and articles from education and the world at large, and to innovative school sites where they can see new approaches in practice. Using this information, they construct a vision. This approach to vision building is bottom-up. The leader does not possess the vision; it is developed and owned by everyone in the organization. The leader facilitates, guides, and supports the process (Conley and others 1991).

Readiness for change is also a systems issue. Some schools have found wisdom in bypassing an attractive project in order to build further support for a guiding vision or philosophy.

David T. Conley is an associate professor of education in the Division of Educational Policy and Management, College of Education, University of Oregon.

Moving to Outcomes

There is a movement at the federal, state, and district levels to focus on educational outcomes, on what students can do, not merely what they have been taught. Numerous states including Oregon, Vermont, California, and Connecticut are developing learner outcomes and assessment strategies that require students to apply their learning to a task or to create a product.

The process of identifying the outcomes that will be assessed is perhaps the most important "next step" in restructuring nationally and at the state and local level. These outcomes will drive curriculum and instructional methods, and will establish *de facto* the purposes of schooling. When schools focus solely on new projects and structural modifications, they overlook this critical dimension.

The effects will be profound. Curriculum battles will be fought over what content all students should know. The emergence of "applied academic" courses will strain traditional distinctions between "vocational" and "academic" dimensions of the curriculum. Attempts to define which combinations of behaviors students should master will lead to intensified debate over the degree to which schools function to prepare students for the world of work, for college, as citizens in a democracy, or to develop each student's potential abilities.

An emphasis on outcomes desired by employers, such as teamwork, problem-solving, communication and interpersonal skills, will lead to more focus on the process of learning, not just the content being taught. Instructional techniques where students are passive learners will be replaced by ones where students are more actively involved in constructing meaning out of information (Brooks 1990). This represents a marked departure from behaviorist philosophies, where teachers define and control learning.

Schools as Open Systems

Restructuring is not occurring primarily because educators simply want to improve schools. External pressure and demands are important motivators. The business community, in particular, has become vocal and articulate in its call for fundamental change in education. Schools are not "closed systems" that can decide what they want to do and set their standards for success in isolation from their constituents.

As educators respond to these external pressures, it becomes clear that schools cannot accomplish their mission without the active support of the community at large, including parents, businesses, and governmental agencies. Guthrie (1991) summarizes this call for greater integration of services, particularly between social

EA 023 906

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

service agencies and schools: "Now is the time to look at the full range of functions that schools are being asked to perform and identify which of those the school is best suited to handle, which can best be provided by other institutions and agencies, and which can best be accomplished by joint effort. The challenge is not simply to divide up responsibilities, but to reconceptualize the role of the school and relationships among the school, the community, and the larger society. The new arrangement must be designed so that it shifts the emphasis of each agency away from itself and toward the client: the child."

Principals and Power

Hallinger and others (1991) report that "principals viewed the effects of restructuring on themselves almost exclusively in terms of power. They forecast new roles with fewer decisions to make by themselves leading to a loss of control and power." Goldman and others (1991) found principals who were learning to redefine their roles in restructuring schools by becoming facilitators. These principals actually perceived an increase in their power and influence as they came to employ new skills such as directing data to teachers to enable them to develop a vision and make decisions, creating new leadership roles and decision-making structures, and allocating resources to achieve the vision.

The ability of principals to make this transition from one leadership style to another, to perceive power as something that is multiplied rather than reduced when it is shared, seems to be one of the key issues affecting the long-term success of restructuring. The issue is not solely governance structures, such as site councils, but the principal's leadership style in relation to such councils.

The Challenge of the At-Risk Student

Restructuring is causing schools to ask a basic question: How much failure is acceptable? Frymier and Gansneder (1989) concluded that between 25 percent and 35 percent of the 22,018 students in their national study were seriously at risk.

National and state policies are establishing expectations that essentially all students will graduate from high school. As schools begin to adjust their goals accordingly, they find most of their basic organizational practices must change. At-risk students demand personalized education, meaningful material, success-based tasks, continuous contact with trusted adults, and a stable peer group.

Traditional grouping and grading practices do not facilitate success for at-risk students. Teachers have a very difficult time accepting the notion that all students can succeed without standards being lowered. There is increasing tension between meeting the needs of both "gifted" and "at-risk" students within the traditional organizational paradigm.

Restructuring schools are using cooperative learning strategies, project centered learning, learning teams, schools-within-schools, block scheduling, advisor-advisee programs, enhanced parental involvement, expansion of learning into the community, and an increasing integration of vocational and academic curricula into "applied academics" courses as strategies to meet the needs of diverse groups of students.

Conclusion

One should not assume that most schools are actively involved in restructuring. If restructuring can be defined as *"activities that change fundamental assumptions, practices and relationships, both within the organization, and between the organization and the outside world, in ways that lead to improved and varied student learning outcomes for essentially all students"* (Conley in press), then it is probable that not more than 10 to 20 percent of American schools are involved in serious restructuring. Most are engaged in some form of *incremental* improvement of practices (Meyer and others 1990) through the development of many projects, what Kirst (1991) calls "project-itis."

The jury is still out on whether incremental changes will be adequate to allow schools to adapt rapidly enough to meet society's changing expectations for public education. There are many indicators, however, that at least in some schools, educators are attempting to rethink education and are beginning to identify and deal with many of the key issues for successful restructuring. These five issues highlight some of the hurdles they must clear in order to be successful.

Resources

Brooks, Jacqueline. "Teachers and Students: Constructivists Forging New Connections." *Educational Leadership* 47, 5 (February 1990): 68-71. EJ 402 402.

Conley, David. *Emerging Trends in School Restructuring*. Eugene, Oregon: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, in press.

Conley, David; Diane Dunlap; and Paul Goldman. "The 'Vision Thing' and School Restructuring." Paper presented at the annual conference of the University Council on Educational Administration, Baltimore, Maryland. October 25, 1991.

Dwyer, David; Cathy Ringstaff; and Judy Sandholtz. "Changes in Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Technology-Rich Classrooms." *Educational Leadership* 48, 8 (May 1991): 45-52. EJ 425 608.

Frymier, Jack, and Bruce Gansneder. "The Phi Delta Kappa Study of Students at Risk." *Phi Delta Kappan* 71, 2 (October 1989): 142-46. EJ 397 715.

Goldman, Paul; Diane Dunlap; and David Conley. "Administrative Facilitation and Site-Based School Reform Projects." Paper presented at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago. April 4, 1991. ED 332 334.

Guthrie, Grace, and Larry Guthrie. "Streamlining Interagency Collaboration for Youth at Risk." *Educational Leadership* 49, 1 (September, 1991): 17-22. EJ 432 685.

Hallinger, Philip; Joseph Murphy; and Charles Hausman. "Restructuring Schools: Principals' Perceptions of Fundamental Educational Reform." Paper presented at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago. April 1991. ED 334 681.

Kirst, Mike. "Pitfalls to Restructuring." *EDCAL* 20, 24 (February 11, 1991): 1.

Meyer, Alan; Geoffrey Brooks; and James Goes. "Environmental Jolts and Industry Revolutions: Organizational Responses to Discontinuous Change." *Strategic Management Journal* 11 (1990): 93-110.

A Product of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management • College of Education, University of Oregon • Eugene, Oregon 97403

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract No. OERI RI88062004. The ideas and opinions expressed in this Digest do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI, ED, or the Clearinghouse. This Digest is in the public domain and may be freely reproduced. EA 023 906